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Senate

The Senate met at 9:30 a.m., and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. STEVENS).

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

God of our eternal hope, those who serve You live in Your presence. Give our lawmakers the wisdom to follow Your teachings. Let Your precepts lead them to make laws that will help the marginalized and strengthen our Nation's moral foundation. May Your wisdom provide them with strategies to defeat the enemies of this land. Remind them that You have a plan which will bring them to a desired end.

Instill in them courage to love their enemies, grace to bless those who curse them, and power to pray for those who mistreat them. By their faithfulness, may they demonstrate daily that they are, indeed, Your children.

We pray in Your holy Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The PRESIDENT pro tempore led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, there will now be a period for the transaction of morning business until 10 a.m., with the time equally divided between the two leaders or their designees.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader is recognized.

SCHEDULE

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, this morning at 10, we will have a vote on the adoption of the conference report to accompany the Department of Defense appropriations bill. That will be the first vote of the day. We will then resume postcloture debate on the border fence bill. Given yesterday's cloture vote of 71 to 28, I am hopeful to complete this bill early in the day.

Following the border fence bill, under the order, there will be a cloture vote on the Child Custody message. The Homeland Security appropriations conference report has been filed, and we will need to consider this important funding legislation as soon as it becomes available. In addition to the items I have outlined, we have executive items to address, including treaties and nominations, one of which is the Secretary of the Department of Transportation. As of now, a Saturday session certainly is a possibility, and I will update my colleagues on the schedule later today as we continue to move forward.

As I said, Senators can anticipate a full day during today's session.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Democratic leader is recognized.

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, while the distinguished majority leader is on the floor, let me make a couple of comments.

First, if I can ask the Parliamentarian: What time will the vote take

place on final passage on the border security bill?

Mr. FRIST. It should be 3 a.m.

Mr. REID. That is a fairly good estimate, Mr. President—about 3 o'clock on Saturday morning?

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, while you are checking that out, it is my understanding, based on discussions last night, that we started at 9 o'clock last night. That is when the time officially started, and it would be 30 hours from 9 o'clock last night, which will be about 3 a.m.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, on the bill that is now before this body, I hope that if there are going to be amendments, one of the amendments we need to take into consideration—I am sure the leader has heard from his Members, as I have heard from mine—is disaster relief. I hope we have this vehicle moving through here today and that we do something regarding agricultural disaster assistance legislation. We passed it three times in this body, and it has never made it out of the House.

It is not just the Midwestern States that we know produce a lot of food. We have had natural disasters all over. The State of Nevada has had raging fires. In California, there is one fire that has been burning since the 1st of September and they still haven't put it out. So I hope the leader will consider that legislation.

Also, I wasn't able to respond to my friend, the distinguished majority leader, last night, but on the India nuclear bill legislation, the reason this matter hasn't been to the floor much earlier is there was a provision put in this legislation by Senator LUGAR. I agree with it. I support the legislation. But on the majority side, there are people who have held up the legislation because of that provision.

This is important legislation. I have said on a number of occasions that I strongly support this legislation. It is important we find time to consider this bill before this Congress comes to an

• This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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end. I think this legislation will be strongly supported by a bipartisan majority in the Senate. It was reported out of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in June on a strong bipartisan basis.

We must understand, it has been many months since the committee action took place. I hope we can take a limited number of amendments with very short time agreements and have it set up so that when we get back here, when the elections are over, this would be the first order of business we move to. We could set it up that we can finish the bill—it will be a very long day—but do it in 1 day.

I believe we should do this, this important legislation. Passage means a lot to our vitally important United States—India relationship. I pledge to do what I can to ensure that we do just that. I hope before we leave here today, tomorrow, or Sunday—whenever it might be—that we will have this bill on so-called automatic pilot, that we can take this up when we get back. I hope that will be the case.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—S. 3994

Finally, on the Iran matter, I hope we can do something on that bill. As the Republican leader said last night, I couldn't think of a worse time for this Iranian matter to lapse. So I now ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the consideration of S. 3994, a bill to extend the Iran and Libya Sanctions Act of 1996 until November 17, 2006; that the bill be read a third time, passed, and the motion to reconsider be laid upon the table.

If we did this, it would put everything in order until that date. It would extend this matter until then. The House has put a lot of other stuff in this bill very recently. There have been no hearings on it. I think it would be in the best interest of the country if we did this. I hope we can. If the leader cannot agree to this request now, I hope we can do it at a subsequent time before we leave in the next few days.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader.

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, did the Senator make a unanimous consent request?

Mr. REID. Yes.

Mr. FRIST. Reserving the right to object, and I will object, I saw for the first time 10 seconds ago what the minority leader has proposed.

I had a unanimous consent request that we proceed to the bill the House passed last night when we started the discussion, and this is a continuation and a response to the fact that we do have to act today.

What I prefer to do is work through the bill the House already passed, H.R. 6198, which has been received from the House. But what we can do is for us to get together and see how best to address this matter, either with the approach the Democratic leader put forward or the approach that I think is much better and much more complete, the House bill.

So I object to his unanimous consent request. Rather than go through the formal unanimous consent request on the House bill, which I have before me, why don't we try to address it.

Mr. REID. I withdraw my request.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The request is withdrawn.

Mr. FRIST. On the India Nuclear Act, it is something we are working on. I believe we do need, before we leave, to put together a package, as the Democratic leader and I have been working toward, something along the order of a day, as he mentioned. Both of these issues are very important. I brought them up last night and we do need to act on those today.

Mr. President, in closing, I wish to say this is a good example. There is going to be a lot happening over these next 24 hours. If we can work through these matters and we can receive the final legislation to be considered on the floor, legislation such as homeland security and port security, I think we will be able to act in a fairly expeditious manner. The clock will run on the border fence bill until 3 a.m. That is when the vote would occur. If, through working together, we are able to manage things in a more orderly way, we will be able to do that.

Following that vote, we have one more vote on child custody protection. Again, these are issues that are very important, but we will do our best working together to get things as coordinated as we possibly can, given some legislation isn't quite ready yet for the floor.

With that, I hope everybody will be very patient over the next 24, 36 hours, and then we will have everybody out and have our Nation's business done.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Idaho is recognized.

VETERANS

Mr. CRAIG. Mr. President, I come to the floor this morning to seek recognition to speak about something that is very important to Congress and the American people, and that is the issue of the state of veterans affairs in this country.

The Senate on Wednesday heard from the Senator from Washington an episode so designed and delivered by her that would suggest that this Congress has ignored and done little to help America's veterans, both current and in the sense of Afghanistan and Iraq, those future veterans. I simply do not agree and take issue with her characterization of the record of the Bush administration and this Republican-led Congress when it comes to caring for America's veterans. In my capacity as chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, I take issue with her suggestion that Congress has done nothing in its job to demand accountability out of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

I must suggest it is not surprising that a month removed from a midterm election our Democratic colleagues are

leveling accusations against a Republican-led Congress that it has failed to hold the Bush administration accountable for a host of issues. Let's remember, it is a political season and the statements made on the floor Wednesday about veterans and veterans affairs is very politically charged.

I have no trouble with tough oversight and accountability and finding answers to serious problems, but to consistently suggest that the sky is falling while leaving out any whiff of praise or any good that has been accomplished is very political at best and it is a disservice to our veterans and the thousands of dedicated VA employees who care for them.

The speech of the Senator from Washington regarding VA provides a very clear example of what I mean. During her speech, the Senator from Washington highlighted a recently released GAO report that confirmed the problems VA encountered in its formulation and execution of its budgets in fiscal years 20005 and 2006 that ultimately led to the Bush administration—that is right, this administration—and this Congress asking for a supplemental funding of \$3 billion.

From that report, she drew her own conclusions—in my view unsubstantiated conclusions—that the VA had misled and even lied to Congress about the veracity of its budget requests. Then she demanded accountability, as if it were nonexistent. I am here to tell my colleagues of the steps that have been taken to establish that accountability that is there and very clear today.

As soon as we learned of last year's budget shortfall, I called hearings and we got answers. The answers all of us received from the VA at that hearing and then in subsequent oversight hearings were what the GAO reported—that they were following much of what was being done to establish greater credibility. More importantly, what the Senator from Washington left out of her rendition of the GAO's report was that VA had already implemented nearly all of the GAO's recommendations prior to submission of its fiscal year 2007 budget in February.

Solutions to a problem were identified and implemented long ago, and that is why our VA is functioning as well as it is today. Also, based upon when we learned during our oversight hearings, we required VA to submit quarterly reports on budget execution. We have received three such reports this year. VA officials made themselves available to Members, to the staff, Republicans and Democrats alike.

We have historically operated the Veterans' Affairs Committee in a very bipartisan way, and it is beyond the pale that it appears we are now into partisan attacks just prior to the election.

Furthermore, for anyone interested in learning the facts about how VA is holding itself accountable for performance, you need to look at the record.